Out of consideration for its bulk, the dinosaur of old Earth evolved two brains: one for serious thought in the head, and another in the tail to take short term responsibility for that appendage. A bureaucracy flung wide across the stars is like a dinosaur--powerful, but cumbersome. Even at speeds in excess of light, the galaxy is a large place. When information infiltrates the system--as from a variety of military sources, news services, and influential individuals--it may take a long time to travel from the source to the center of intelligence. And while the head, charged with survival of the whole, is forced to consider many options and makes decisions slowly, the tail makes swifter ones based on lesser orders of complexity and closer physical proximity to the problem. Tails tend to be parochial in their loyalties--tail uber alles--which is one reason the dinosaur is no more. Goren's message had stung one of these tails first--Sector Command for the quadrant.

The Enterprise was ordered directly back to Ixmahx, warp nine all the way, and forbidden to initiate or receive any energy transmission from the planet. It was instructed to destroy any other ship initiating or receiving such energy transmission, and if necessary to destroy said planet rather than let it initiate an energy transmission. Explanation to follow. Galactic security at stake. End transmission.

"What kind of an order is that?" Scotty protested.

"You can't just destroy a whole world--" sputtered McCoy.

"Who signed that order, Lieutenant."

"An admiral named Singh, Captain. Sector Command. But I've never heard of him."

"Well find out who he is and if he's entitled to issue that kind of an order. And get me a subspace punch through to Nomura that we want more information--about six AU's out from Ixmahx our ETA warp nine. Scotty, it might be the real thing, so get me a Class A weapons check. Sulu, are we on our way?"

"Awaiting your order, sir."

"Go. Then get over to the science station and find out the optimum method for destroying that planet." Kirk's commands crackled around the bridge like static electricity. "Uhura, get me a rehas of Meade's transmission on Ixmahx. What's our ETA?"

"Six hours, sir," said Sulu, caught halfway between consoles. Mr. Spock won't be expecting us for--" he compared clocks in his head, "--eighteen or twenty hours. Even if we can't contact him, he has the shuttle--"

"I'll worry about Mr. Spock," Kirk cut him off. It was natural for them to think first of their own officers. The mind avoided unpleasantness, and the destruction of a planet was almost too large to encompass anyway. Even a Kodos could not know personally all the lovers, families, friends--and go on killing them. To do that you reduced a world to a target, a coordinate on a grid, and that was what you destroyed--just numbers. It was very neat at the academy. You learned how to do it because they didn't want volunteers for the dirty work. They wanted career men whose ties were to the service and the traditions of the service, Preferably not married, with no civilian ties. That way you might have people on a planet somewhere. And that might warp your judgement.

He took the Ixmahx information to his cabin, and McCoy joined him there with the unknown Admiral's record. Singh was a retirement age desk pusher who had never seen service in the field.

"That's a political promotion if I ever saw one, Jim. They're going to flush him out in a year, and that will give him just enough time-in-rank to retire with an Admiral's pension. There's not one thing in his record that would have given him that job on merit. He's a glorified civil servant. God knows why he's in command there--maybe his boss is on vacation."

"No--" Kirk's analysis of the record matched McCoy's. "His boss is retired. Admiral Dice endorsed the promotion. He retired a couple months ago. He'd kept the sector pretty well in hand, too--with the Organians to help. The Romulan infiltration only began with the rumors of an Ixmahx find four months back. He probably didn't think there'd be any trouble and that it would make a nice soft billet for Singh. But that doesn't get me off the hook. Singh got his information from the Planetary Speaker on Ixmahx."

"Who's supposed to be down there with Spock."

"Who isn't expecting us for another twenty hours. Well, the first thing we have to do is keep our ears open and make sure nobody gets any closer than we do. If Spock got to Goren, he'll know about the communication problem."

"Could they still use the shuttle?"

"If it was safe. I wouldn't want to count on it."

"But how will we know--"

"Hell, Bones, how do I know? There must be forty ways to signal an orbiting space craft--forest fires, letters in the snow, dye in the ocean. We could see a blink from a good sized mirror without laying a sensor on them, but how are they going to know we're looking?" He rubbed the back of his neck. "And what if Nomura goes along with Singh?"

But having issued its orders, the tail brain slept again, and when the Enterprise dropped out of warp drive six AU's out from Ixmahx, Nomura's response had not yet reached them. It gave Kirk a thin excuse to shape the broad parabolas of a search pattern about Ixmahx and verify that no other ship, probe or drone was was trying to contact the planet.

"Safe so far," said Kirk. "Now we sweat."

In the dark labrynth surrounding the Throat of Fire they were all sweating, except Spock. And they were blocked. Goren had led them to a dead end where their path ran up to a smooth black wall and stopped.. They had all explored it with their hands and found nothing when Spock turned and faced back up their trail.

"What is it?" asked Dray.